

BREAKING THE CIRCLE

by

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Characters:

Cast of 7 (4M 3F)

NAD (DANIEL) FOSTER – around thirty
KELLY MILFORD – mid twenties
SAMMY FOSTER – late sixties (*Wiltshire accent*)
NEIL VICKERS – around forty
HILARY VICKERS – around forty
TIM FOSTER – around forty
LINDA ROBERTS – around forty

Synopsis of scenes:

Act 1

Scene 1 – Midsummer’s Eve. 6.30 p.m.

Scene 2 – Same evening. 9.45 p.m.

Scene 3 – The following morning. 10.30 a.m.

Act 2

Scene 1 – The action continues from Act 1.

Scene 2 – The following morning. 10.45 a.m.

Place – A farmhouse in Wiltshire, England.

Time – The present.

Act 1

Scene 1

Midsummer's Eve. 6.30 p.m.

The living room in the farmhouse. The front door is on the US wall on the SL side. There is a casement window also on the US wall. An open interior door leads to the kitchen/dining area, DSR. Stairs lead up and off to the upstairs bedrooms, USR. In the room there is an old sofa and armchair with a coffee table in reach. A couple of wooden kitchen chairs are somewhere in the room. A fireplace is built into the SL wall with a set of fire irons nearby. A small wall mirror is on one of the walls and a large picture of a rural scene is high above the fireplace.

Sound of kitchen window being hit and a catch being unfastened. NAD enters from the kitchen. He surveys the room. He crosses to the fireplace and picks out the poker from the set of fire irons. He holds it for a moment. He looks up to the picture above the fireplace. He places the poker on the sofa and is about to take one of the kitchen chairs when the sound of dog barking is heard in the distance. NAD deliberates for a moment before exiting into the kitchen. Dog barking draws closer.

SAMMY: (Off.) Jip! Shut it, boy! Sit! Stay there!

Sound of keys opening the front door. SAMMY enters through the front door. He notices the poker on the sofa.

(Calling.) Hello? Anybody here?

SAMMY takes the poker. He crosses to the kitchen and looks off. He crosses to the stairs.

(Calling.) Anybody up there? Timothy? Timothy, you up there?

He starts to cough and wheeze. He takes out a hip flask and has a couple of swigs. He enters the kitchen. Sound of window closing. There is the sound of a car arriving. Jip barks. SAMMY enters from the kitchen.

Jip! Shut it, boy!

SAMMY crosses to the casement window and opens one side. Sound of car doors opening and closing. Jip barks

again.

Jip!

SAMMY crosses to the front door and glances outside.

Shut it, Jip!

He raises the poker threateningly. Jip whimpers and falls silent. SAMMY replaces the poker with the rest of the fire irons. HILARY appears outside the window.

HILARY: Hello.

SAMMY: Afternoon.

HILARY: Samuel Foster, I presume.

SAMMY: That's me.

HILARY: Hilary. (*Jip.*) He's sweet. What is he – she?

SAMMY: A pest most of the time, that's what he is.

HILARY: Ah. (*To Jip.*) I'm sure you're not a pest, are you?

Jip barks.

Are you? No.

SAMMY: Jip, shut it!

HILARY: Looks like we beat them to it. Don't see their car. Oh, so hot, isn't it? Okay to come in?

SAMMY: It's open.

HILARY: (*Calling back.*) Neil, come on.

HILARY exits from the window. She enters through the front door carrying a couple of shopping bags.

(Surveying the room.) This is...

SAMMY: How do you know him then – Timothy?

HILARY: Friends from school – him and Neil.

Jip barks.

SAMMY: Jip!

NEIL appears outside the window.

HILARY: It's okay, he doesn't bite. I'm assuming he doesn't.

SAMMY: Not unless I tell him to.

HILARY: Come in.

NEIL exits from the window.

He's got a stiff shoulder... slept awkwardly in the car.

NEIL appears at the front door.

This is Neil, my husband.

SAMMY: You know Timothy from school then, she says?

NEIL: Yes.

SAMMY: Have I seen you 'ere before?

NEIL: No.

SAMMY: He's coming with *her* I presume.

HILARY: Linda? Yes.

SAMMY grunts.

Not a fan?

SAMMY: I preferred his last one... and she were no good either. Gold diggers – both of 'em. I can spot 'em a mile off... spot 'em a mile off.

HILARY: Tim said you've been renting the place here.

SAMMY: I'll let him give you the guided tour. Don't do stairs now – not if I can help it. Word of warning, you'd do best to lock up when you go out and when you turn in for the night. We get 'em around 'ere – troublemakers. If they can see it they'll 'ave it.

HILARY: Okay. Who's they, locals or – ?

SAMMY: Youths, troublemakers. I'll catch 'em one of these days, catch 'em at it – with my gun. Then they'll be sorry.

HILARY: You'd shoot at them?

SAMMY: Put the fear of God into 'em. Make sure they don't come back. Tell Timothy to call on me when he comes – just him, not her. Key's in the door.

SAMMY exits through the front door. Jip barks.

Move it, Jip! Get going!

Barking fades into the distance.

HILARY: Well, wouldn't like to get on the wrong side of him. This is all right, isn't it? (*Shoulder.*) How is it? (*Demonstrating arm movement.*) Do this.

NEIL: I can't, it's seized up.

HILARY: Try.

NEIL: I've tried. I can't.

HILARY: (*Shopping.*) Better put this stuff away before it expires.

HILARY takes a couple of bottles of wine from the shopping.

Open one of these, shall we? Just about cold enough still. Which one, the Pinot Grigio or the Sauvignon Blanc? Neil?

NEIL: Whatever.

HILARY: Pick one, any one.

NEIL: Whatever.

HILARY: Okay, I choose this one.

NEIL: This is definitely going to be hell, all of us cooped up in here like this.

HILARY: No it isn't.

NEIL: We'll be at each other's throats with kitchen knives in a couple of days.

HILARY: No we won't.

NEIL: You'll see.

HILARY: Well I, for one, am not planning on spending the week cooped up inside – not in this weather – I’m hoping to go on some good, long, country walks – with you. They’ll want to do their own thing too... together.

HILARY exits into the kitchen with the shopping. Sound of things being put away. NEIL attempts to stretch out his arm.

NEIL: Ah!

He tries again.

Ah!

He gives up, sits and slumps back in the chair.

I’ve got nothing to say to him... You don’t like her... I can’t stand her. No-one’s got anything to say anyone.

HILARY enters from the kitchen with two glasses of white wine.

HILARY: That’s not true, you and Tim have got plenty to reminisce about.

NEIL: We don’t – not any more.

HILARY: And it’s not true I don’t like Linda either. Okay, I probably wouldn’t be best buddies with her if she wasn’t with Tim, but I’m prepared to make a bit of an effort. Like I say, we’ll be off doing our own thing – you and me, Tim and Linda. We’ll probably hardly see them. I want this to be good for us, Neil. Here.

HILARY offers the wine to NEIL. He indicates his bad shoulder.

You’re not going to help it sitting like that.

She places the glass beside him.

(Drinks.) Mmm, not a bad choice... if I say so myself.

HILARY crosses to the window and opens the remaining side.

Listen to that.

NEIL: What?

HILARY: Shhh! Listen.

NEIL: I don't hear anything.

HILARY: Precisely. No traffic, no sirens, peace and quiet. You know what I was *reminiscing* about on the way down. Cyprus. In that cave, remember? Never done it in a cornfield before. You? Might be quite exciting... fun.

NEIL: Doubt it. Pretty rough that stuff.

HILARY: Barley field then. Outdoors, in the sunshine. We could take a picnic, some wine. Enjoy the sun on our bodies.

NEIL: Probably get someone like him shooting at us.

HILARY: We'll go somewhere quiet, discreet.

NEIL: In the middle of a cornfield.

HILARY: Yes, Neil, we'll find somewhere. If you want to that is. Neil?

NEIL: What?

HILARY: If you want to. It will be good for us. Somewhere different. A change is as good as a rest they say. And we've had plenty of rest. Time for a change. If you still... Neil?

NEIL: (*Curtly.*) Yes.

HILARY: And I do want you to ask him – while we're here together.

NEIL: No.

HILARY: Just to ask.

NEIL: No, I've said I don't need any charity hand-outs – not from him – not from anyone.

HILARY: It's just asking him if he knows of something –

NEIL: No.

HILARY: Neil –

NEIL clutches his leg in pain.

NEIL: Ah! Ah!

HILARY: What is it?

NEIL: Cramp! Ah!

HILARY: Get up, put some weight on it.

NEIL does so.

Walk on it, walk it off.

NEIL painfully staggers about the room.

Better?

NEIL crosses to the front door.

Where are you going?

NEIL: To walk it off.

HILARY: Well don't be too long, they'll be –

NEIL exits through the front door.

(To herself.) Oh!

HILARY takes out her mobile. She checks it and tries different places in the room for reception. She exits into the kitchen.

KELLY: *(Off. Calling.)* Nad? Nad?

KELLY appears outside the window.

Nad? Are you in here? Nad?

KELLY exits from the window. HILARY enters from the kitchen.

HILARY: Hello?

KELLY appears at the front door.

KELLY: Oh, hi.

HILARY: Hi?

KELLY: Sorry, looking for someone – Nad. I guess he's not in here.

HILARY: No.

KELLY: This your place?

HILARY: Friend's.

KELLY: On holiday?

HILARY: Yes.

KELLY: Croppie?

HILARY: Sorry?

KELLY: You a croppie? Here for the crop circles?

HILARY: Oh.

KELLY: I guess not.

HILARY: No.

KELLY: This is the place to be if you are – where they all happen... the good ones anyway. I'm Kelly.

HILARY: Hilary.

KELLY: You here alone, or – ?

HILARY: No, my husband's just out there – friends are on their way.

KELLY: Got nice weather for it.

HILARY: Yes.

KELLY: Celebrating tonight.

HILARY: No, not really.

KELLY: No we are – a group of us. We're camping over there, the other side of the village – if you can call it that.

HILARY: What's the celebration?

KELLY: Midsummer's Eve.

HILARY: Oh, you celebrate that do you?

KELLY: We do tonight. Come along if you like – join us.

HILARY: Oh...

KELLY: The more the merrier. We'll probably go on all night so any time. Like I say, we're over there. You'll probably see our fire... and hear us, most likely

HILARY: Thanks, I'll see what the others say.

KELLY: If he shows up here – Nad – tell him I've gone back to the camp will you.

HILARY: Will do.

KELLY: We've just been in one – crop circle – before he ran off. It's still pretty new so still got a good energy to it. Hasn't been too trampled in yet by the croppies. Go and check it out. Up the road here, turn in to the field at the phone box, keep walking down the tram and you can't miss it.

HILARY: Okay... might do.

KELLY: Nice to meet you, Hilary.

HILARY: You too, Kelly.

KELLY: May see you later.

HILARY: Perhaps.

KELLY exits through the front door. HILARY crosses to the window and looks out.

(Calling.) Neil? Neil?

She turns back into the room and checks her mobile again for reception. She exits upstairs. Sound of car arriving and pulling to a stop. Sound of car door opening.

LINDA: *(Off.)* Bastard!

Sound of car door slamming. After a couple of moments there is the sound of a car door opening and closing. TIM appears outside the window.

TIM: Hello in here? Anyone at home?

HILARY: *(Off. Calling.)* Hello?

TIM: *(Calling.)* We're here... *(More to himself.)* more or less.

TIM exits from the window. HILARY enters from upstairs. TIM appears at the front door.

Hils.

HILARY: Tim.

TIM: Found it okay?

HILARY: Miracles of GPS.

TIM: How are you?

HILARY: Good thanks, you?

TIM: Not bad, not bad. What about this weather then!

HILARY: Yes, amazing.

TIM: This is England for God's sake, shouldn't someone be told? Met Uncle Sammy then I take it – unless you broke in.

HILARY: Yes – met him.

TIM: His charming self as ever no doubt. Is Neil about? *(Calling.)* Neily boy, you hiding somewhere?

HILARY: He's out, walking off cramp.

TIM: Oh?

HILARY: He fell asleep in the car, got himself in a bad position.

TIM: Oh dear. Hope he wasn't driving.

HILARY: No.

TIM: *(House.)* Well, what do you think?

HILARY: It's lovely, very... rustic, lot of character.

TIM: Certainly has that... certainly has that. *(Wine.)* Made a start I see.

HILARY: Yes, couldn't wait I'm afraid.

TIM: No, quite right.

HILARY: Want some?

TIM: Thought you'd never ask.

HILARY exits into the kitchen. TIM picks up NEIL's glass and sniffs it. He takes out his mobile and checks it.

Reception's a disaster around here, you've probably noticed.

HILARY: *(Off.)* Yes.

TIM: The best place is up the road... by the phone box.

HILARY enters from the kitchen with a glass of wine.

HILARY: Hopefully it's chilled enough.

TIM: What have we got here then?

HILARY: Sauvignon Blanc, New Zealand.

TIM: Okay.

TIM tastes the wine noisily.

Very agreeable. Brought a few down with me from the collection – mainly red. A couple of stunners in my opinion – for the price. Just managed to squeeze them in beside Linda's luggage. I don't know how long she thinks she's coming for – packed for the entire summer – either that or this is her roundabout way of letting me know she's leaving me.

HILARY: How is she?

TIM: She's fine... fine.

HILARY: Is she...?

TIM: Just gone for a bit of a leg stretch herself.

HILARY: *(Raising glass.)* Cheers, Tim.

TIM: Cheers.

HILARY: Thanks for inviting us. We needed a holiday.

TIM: We all do. No, wanted you to see the place in its raw state before any developments happen. Better see how much the old badger is going to give me before I start making any concrete plans. He might just leave me the kitchen and the rest to his dog knowing him. But in the hope that he does give me the lot I've

got plans – things I'd like to get your input on – yours and Neil's.

HILARY: Okay.

TIM checks his mobile.

TIM: Oh, Jesus!

HILARY: Problems?

TIM: Serious problems.

HILARY: What is it?

TIM: We seem to have lost both our openers in the space of ten minutes. Test match. We only need a hundred and fifty nine to win. It should be a stroll in the park. Fifteen for two already – run out and LBW.

HILARY: Oh dear.

TIM: All they had to do was play themselves in. Against the bloody Aussies of course. Still, early days. Bradshaw's in now, see what he can do.

HILARY: Tim?

TIM: Hm?

HILARY: Just while we have a moment together... I know he won't ask you himself – Neil.

TIM: Ask me what?

HILARY: If you knew of something – workwise – Neil could...

TIM: Ah.

HILARY: Just if you... Anything really he could –

TIM: Yes.

HILARY: You do?

TIM: No, I mean yes, I understand.

HILARY: Ah.

TIM: Tricky time at the moment in the current climate, people

fighting to hang on to their jobs as it is. No-one would take too kindly to me airdropping and old school chum into the arena to crank up the pressure that bit more. Certainly wouldn't be flavour of the month – or the year for that matter.

HILARY: No, I'm not...

TIM: Having said that, I do know there's a reshuffle about to happen in Basingstoke. There may be something there I might be able to find for him – if he doesn't mind what.

HILARY: No.

TIM: And he doesn't mind Basingstoke.

HILARY: No, that would be –

TIM: No promises. I'll make enquiries. Leave it with me.

HILARY: Thanks, Tim –

TIM: Still no luck with the legal...?

HILARY: No, Jerry seems to have it all sewn up. He was the financial brains after all.

TIM: The bastard.

HILARY: I kept telling Neil to show more interest in that side of things but... Neil being Neil –

TIM: You're still fighting it though?

HILARY: I've tried, but Neil's got to want to too.

TIM: Well doesn't he? Don't let the rascal get away with it, that's what I say. Family too – cousin right? Even worse.

HILARY: Second.

TIM: What?

HILARY: Second cousin.

TIM: Still, doesn't make him any less of a complete and utter swine.

LINDA has appeared outside the window.

LINDA: No, it doesn't.

TIM: Ah, she's back.

LINDA: She is.

HILARY: Hi, Linda.

LINDA: Hi, Hilary.

TIM: Nice walk?

LINDA: If you can call breaking my knee nice – then yes.

TIM: Oh dear. Said you shouldn't go hiking in those shoes.

LINDA: Thanks for your concern – as usual.

HILARY: Wait there I'll come and...

HILARY exits through the front door.

LINDA: You do realise we're in the middle of nowhere, don't you.

TIM: Nowhere's nowhere.

LINDA: This is.

HILARY appears outside the window.

HILARY: Here, give me your arm.

LINDA and HILARY exit from the window. TIM checks his mobile.

TIM: That's more like it, England!

HILARY enters through the front door supporting LINDA. LINDA's outfit is muddied.

LINDA: Ow! Ow! Ow!

HILARY: Come to the sofa here.

TIM: Doesn't look too broken.

LINDA: It's broken. Ow! Ow! Ow!

HILARY helps LINDA to the sofa.

HILARY: Let me get something to put on it.

HILARY exits into the kitchen.

- LINDA: (Shoes.) And look at these, fucking ruined!
- TIM: They'll scrub out.
- LINDA: They will not scrub out, they're ruined!
- TIM: If you say so. I did say this was going to be a rural setting.
- LINDA: You didn't tell me we were going on holiday in the Middle Ages. I'd have brought my peasants weeds.
- TIM: I did say it would be rural.
- LINDA: And, God, look at this hovel!
- TIM: Hardly that. Anyway roughing it a bit's good for the soul.
- LINDA: What would you know about the soul?
- TIM: Give it time, it will grow on you.
- LINDA: The only thing that's going to grow on anyone here is fungi.
- TIM: Give it a day – or two.
- LINDA: I'm not giving it a night. I want you to take me somewhere – somewhere that happens to actually be somewhere – or you're driving me home.
- TIM: (Wine.) I'm not driving anywhere now – now I've started on this.

HILARY enters from the kitchen with ice wrapped in a tea towel.

- HILARY: There wasn't much ice left, I'm afraid. This should help with any swelling. Perhaps you'd like to put it up.

LINDA puts her leg up.

- LINDA: Ow! Ow!

HILARY places the compress on her knee.

Ow!

- HILARY: How's that?

LINDA: Wonderful, thanks.

HILARY: Maybe you could...

LINDA: What?

HILARY: Hold it there yourself.

LINDA: Oh.

LINDA does so.

HILARY: I know what you need.

LINDA: A replacement to him – a caring model.

HILARY: A glass of chilled white wine – semi chilled.

LINDA: That'll help, I'm sure.

HILARY exits into the kitchen. TIM keeps an eye on his mobile and the cricket.

Expecting her to call you?

TIM: Any moment now.

LINDA: You wouldn't be subjecting *her* to this ordeal. You'd be whooping it up in a five star hotel somewhere.

TIM: At the very least I should imagine.

LINDA: Bastard.

TIM: Damn! Bloody damn! Bloody...! You had one job, Bradshaw! One job!

HILARY enters from the kitchen with the bottle and a glass for LINDA.

HILARY: Problems?

TIM: They're dropping like bloody flies the top order. Just lost Martin Bradshaw for ten. He's the key man, Bradshaw, the key man. There's only Brightman now, the rest are pretty mediocre – batting-wise.

LINDA: We're not interested.

TIM: Hils is.

LINDA: He insisted on having it on in the car on the way down. Tedious game.

TIM: Not to the informed.

LINDA: Commentators are so bored they have to talk about the clouds or pigeons.

TIM: All vital to the pitch condition – the clouds more than the pigeons that is.

HILARY has poured a glass of wine for LINDA. She gives it to her.

HILARY: This should help.

LINDA: Thanks.

HILARY: Top up, Tim?

TIM: Thanks.

HILARY: Cheers.

LINDA: Cheers.

TIM: Cheers.

HILARY: The last time we did anything like this was that canal boat holiday in Shropshire. Before we knew you, Linda. Remember that, Tim?

TIM: Do I.

HILARY: Rained the whole time, didn't it?

TIM: Complete washout.

HILARY: I spent most of it below deck. Tim and Neil were up top fighting over the wheel.

TIM: Not fighting – negotiating.

HILARY: They steered us into another boat on one occasion.

TIM: That was Neil, not me, he was skippering then.

HILARY: Curry everywhere. I was cooking it at the time. Boat stank of it for the rest of the holiday.

LINDA: Sorry to have missed that one.

HILARY: At least this one won't be a washout – if it carries on like this.

TIM: Doesn't look like it's going anywhere soon. Hit thirty today apparently. It's more than England are managing to do.

HILARY: How's the knee?

LINDA: (*Wine.*) This seems to be numbing things quite nicely.

TIM: Looks like a bit of woodworm up there. Yes, definitely woodworm. Need to get the place checked out thoroughly – before commencing anything structural. Unless I decide to pull it all down and start from scratch.

LINDA: That would be my suggestion.

HILARY: He has no children of his own then to leave it to – your Uncle Sammy?

TIM: No – well, he *had*.

HILARY: Oh?

TIM: Son. Daniel. Drowned – in the Bristol Channel.

HILARY: Oh. When was this?

TIM: When he was a youngster – early teens.

HILARY: He was swimming there?

TIM: Not exactly. He went there to do it. They found his clothes nearby.

HILARY: Ah.

TIM: He was a troubled kid, behavioural problems. Set fire to the workers' cottages – here on the land – before he ran off.

HILARY: Did they find him – his body?

TIM: No. I guess with those currents you could end up anywhere.

HILARY: Did you know him well?

TIM: I knew him, but he was a few years younger than me. I never hung out with him when I was down here. I always came with

my own friends. A few years difference is a chasm at that age.

HILARY: Your poor Uncle Sammy.

TIM: Yes. So that makes me the sole heir and beneficiary to the Samuel Foster estate – for what it’s worth.

HILARY: Oh, he wanted you to call in on him when you arrived, Tim.

TIM: Okay. I’ll go and visit the old badger in his shack.

HILARY: Shack?

TIM: Caravan, down the road. He says it’s all he needs now. I’ll bring madam’s cases in, shall I? You’re probably wanting to get out of those soiled garments.

LINDA: Just madam’s blue one. There wouldn’t happen to be a bath would there in this... establishment?

TIM: Yes, we have one of those – two in fact.

LINDA: Hot running water?

TIM: That too.

LINDA: (*Compress.*) Thanks for this. (*Standing.*) Ow! Ow! (*To TIM.*) Any clues?

TIM: Up the stairs, first on your right.

HILARY: Let me help you.

LINDA: Thanks, but I ought to get used to walking unassisted. (*Giving glass to HILARY.*) You could bring another one of these up for me though.

HILARY: Will do.

LINDA hobbles towards the stairs.

Ow! Ow!

LINDA exits upstairs.

TIM: (*Finishing his wine.*) Thanks for this. Not a bad drop that. Something light and fruity to excite the palate, prepare it for the more serious fare to come. I’ll crack open something special for tonight – perhaps the Margaux. Oh, what are we doing about grub, by the way?

HILARY: All under control tonight.

TIM: That's what I like to hear.

HILARY: Ratatouille if that's okay?

TIM: Lovely. The Margaux will compliment that quite nicely. If I come across Neil I'll send him back in for kitchen duties, shall I?

HILARY: Good luck with that one. Thanks again, Tim, for inviting us down.

TIM: Great to have you both here. It should be fun.

LINDA: *(Off. Upstairs.)* Oh Jesus, you must be joking!

Sound of door slamming upstairs.

TIM: She'll perk up after her bath.

HILARY: And thanks for... looking into... Basingstoke –

TIM: Oh, yes. No promises.

HILARY: No.

TIM: Leave it with me, I'll see what I can do.

TIM exits through the front door. He passes by the window checking his mobile.

(Off.) Come on, England, pull your finger out!

HILARY gathers the wine glasses and exits into the kitchen.

Lights down.

Scene 2

Same evening. 9.45 p.m.

NAD stands outside the window. He looks in. He looks off toward the camp and exits from the window. LINDA enters from the kitchen carrying her wine glass. TIM appears at the kitchen door with his wine glass.

TIM: *(Talking back to kitchen.)* No, definitely Neil that was. You'd

wrapped the rope around that mooring post far too tightly, remember? Boat couldn't go anywhere except up in the air. Luckily we had the axe to hand – I did. Sure we can't help out?

- HILARY: *(Off.)* No, we're fine, go through.
- TIM: *(Talking back to kitchen.)* Seems unfair you should cook *and* wash up.
- HILARY: *(Off.)* Really, we're fine.
- TIM: *(Talking back to kitchen.)* Okay, like I say, our turn tomorrow.
- LINDA: We won't be here tomorrow, I thought we'd agreed.
- TIM: No.
- LINDA: *I* won't be.
- TIM: Still determined to hate it, are we?
- LINDA: Yes we are. What's there to like? It's grimy, smelly, the bed's on a slope, the bath struggles to fill and God knows what's crawling around in the bedding. It's bad enough having to spend one night here. I mean it, you either take me to a hotel tomorrow – a spa hotel – or you're taking me home. Like I say, you certainly wouldn't be subjecting Serena Elvington to this ordeal.
- TIM: Could we please stop talking about her.
- LINDA: If you'd stop texting her I would.
- TIM: I am not.
- LINDA: I saw you – under the table. Cara was right about you.
- TIM: Was she.
- LINDA: She was. She'd said you'd revert to type once the gloss had worn off.
- TIM: Oh, what type is that then?
- LINDA: Scoundrel.
- TIM: Really.
- LINDA: I should have listened to her.

TIM: Your good friend Cara Phillips is this?

LINDA: Yes.

TIM: Well, she should know all about scoundrel types.

LINDA: Meaning?

TIM: I didn't tell you – wasn't going to – but now you bring her up. She turned up at the house one Saturday afternoon – in a taxi and a fur coat – a little excitable from one or two too many gin and tonics.

LINDA: When?

TIM: When you were on your 'cultural break' in Paris in January.

LINDA: She knew I was in Paris, I texted her regularly.

TIM: I know. She received one from you while she was there.

LINDA: What did she want?

TIM: I would have thought that was patently obvious – it was to me.

LINDA: What...? You're lying.

TIM: Why would I lie?

LINDA: She wouldn't.

TIM: She did. Quite a shapely figure under all that fur. Heart tattoo on her left breast – or was it her right – no left, right first time. Took me by surprise, her casting off her coat in the living room like that – especially with what she was wearing underneath – or *wasn't* wearing, I should say.

LINDA: The bitch! And did you...?

TIM: Did I?

LINDA: Did you fuck her?

TIM: Well... if I was the scoundrel type like you both say I am.

LINDA: Did you? Did you fuck – ?

NEIL appears at the kitchen door with his wine glass.

TIM: Ah, Neil, relieved from kitchen duties? Come in and join us.

(Wine.) How you finding that? Really starts to open up about now, doesn't it? Those smooth, aromatic notes bursting to the fore. Hils coming through? *(Calling off.)* Coming to join us, Hils?

HILARY: *(Off.)* In a mo, just finishing off.

TIM: *(Calling off.)* Don't miss out on all the fun.

TIM crosses to the window and looks out.

Seems to be a fire over there. Hope it's under control, things could go up like... well, wildfire in this heat. I never brought you down here, did I Neil, in the holidays. Brought Si Fuller, Toby Johnson – Trots of course, Kenny Trotter, a couple of times. He was a character, eh? No doubt still is. Haven't kept in touch. You, Neil?

NEIL: No.

TIM: Good place to begin one's 'education' here – if you get my gist, Neil – cavorting with the local wenches. Must've been the good country air that made everyone so... playful.

HILARY enters from the kitchen with her wine glass.

Ah, here she is, the culinary supremo. Tomorrow I'll rustle up one of my legendary beef bourguignons.

HILARY: Lovely.

TIM: You say that now, they're legendary for a reason.

HILARY: Everyone okay?

TIM: You bet.

HILARY: Neil?

NEIL: What?

HILARY: You okay?

NEIL: Yes, thanks.

TIM: He's lost in the rapture of the Margaux. It's at it's best now it's fully breathed. Trouble is we've practically drunk it. Business retreat, another idea. A quiet out of the way place to hammer out that all important deal. Renovate the workers' cottages for accommodation. Riding stables – another. Know sod all about

horses, but can find someone who does to manage it. You used to ride didn't you, Hils?

HILARY: Used to.

TIM: There you go, you can run it with Neil. Fancy running a riding stables, Neil?

NEIL: Not particularly thanks.

TIM: Like I say, better see how much the old badger's going to give me. Mustn't sell the hide before killing the lion, as they say. Looks like we're ready to crack open something else. I've got something in mind. Won't be as robust as this one, but something that will follow nicely on its heels. Be right back.

TIM exits into the kitchen.

HILARY: Still so warm – and humid. It's going to be a sticky night.

LINDA: *(Dryly.)* It is.

HILARY looks out the window.

HILARY: That must be them – their fire.

LINDA: Whose fire?

HILARY: Girl who passed by earlier. She said she and some friends would be celebrating tonight. Midsummer's Eve.

LINDA: What was she, a Druid?

HILARY: She wasn't dressed like one. She may've been in disguise, I suppose.

LINDA: That's what they do isn't it in these remote parts?

HILARY: What?

LINDA: Toss virgins on bonfires.

HILARY: You don't think that's why she asked us along, do you? She was out looking for virgins. I should have put that sign up: 'No virgins kept on these premises'.

LINDA: She asked us along?

HILARY: Yes.

TIM: *(Off.)* Bugger! 'Scuse language.

LINDA: Then what are we doing sitting around here? Girl you say?

HILARY: Yes.

LINDA: How old?

HILARY: Twenty something.

LINDA: Perfect. Let's go. Neil's up for a party, aren't you, Neil?

NEIL: No thanks.

LINDA: Come on, Neil, let your hair down a bit – so to speak. Okay, we'll go, just us gals. Leave the menfolk to talk about... whatever it is they talk about.

TIM enters from the kitchen with a new wine bottle.

TIM: Sorry for the delay, cork failure.

LINDA: We're off to a party.

TIM: Are we?

LINDA: You're not, Hils and I are. You're staying to keep Neil company.

NEIL: I don't need keeping company, thanks.

LINDA: Well it's just the two of us. *(To HILARY.)* No need to dress up, is there. And we mustn't go empty handed.

LINDA exits into the kitchen.

TIM: Whose party?

HILARY: Just some girl who passed by earlier. She asked us along.

TIM: *(Calling.)* If it's wine you're after don't pick up anything with Bordeaux on the label.

HILARY: Sorry, I shouldn't have mentioned anything.

TIM: Not your fault, party happening she'd have sniffed it out sooner or later. Where is it?

HILARY: Where that fire is over there.

LINDA enters from the kitchen with two bottles of wine.

TIM: Two?

LINDA: There's two of us. *(To HILARY.)* Ready?

HILARY: I'm...

LINDA: What?

HILARY: I'm not sure if I want to –

LINDA: You're not chickening out, are you?

HILARY: I'm just a bit... tired.

LINDA: Come on, this will wake you up – bit of dancing round a bonfire. It'll be fun.

TIM: If she doesn't want to she doesn't want to.

LINDA: Okay, just me then.

TIM: Just you. And you'll just need the one of these.

TIM takes one of the wine bottles from LINDA.

I must say your broken knee seems to have made a miraculous recovery. Perhaps we should call the Vatican.

LINDA: *(To HILARY.)* Last chance.

TIM: We won't wait up.

LINDA exits through the front door.

HILARY: Maybe I should... keep her company.

TIM: Not if you don't want to. She's a big girl now, she doesn't need a chaperone. Here have some of this. A very palatable Cotes Du Rhone, I think you'll find. Like I say, should follow nicely on the heels of the last one.

TIM fills HILARY's glass.

HILARY: Thanks.

TIM: Neil?

NEIL: No... thanks.

TIM: Still savouring that. Good man.

TIM fills his own glass.

The secret of the Rhone is you have to drink them young. Don't let them hang about too long – not like the Bordeaux. Some of those you can keep tucked away till your dotage – if you can wait that long. Quality varies of course with the Rhone – as do all wines – from the ordinary to the exceptional.

TIM tastes noisily.

This is somewhere on the high end of the in between... in my opinion.

HILARY: Neil?

NEIL: No.

HILARY: I mentioned to Neil, Tim, about what you said.

TIM: Said?

HILARY: About the job – the possibility of the –

TIM: Oh yes. Can't promise anything of course, Neil.

NEIL: I'm fine thanks.

TIM: I can only make enquiries, see what I can do.

NEIL: I'm all right, thanks.

TIM: Leave it with me.

NEIL: I'm fine.

HILARY: Neil –

NEIL: I don't need any charity hand-outs, thanks.

HILARY: It's not. Tim's just –

NEIL: I don't need to be a tea boy in Basingstoke.

HILARY: It won't be that, will it, Tim?

TIM: No... no – not sure what it will be – if anything yet, you understand. Like I say...

NEIL crosses to the front door.

HILARY: Neil, where are you going?

NEIL: To get some air.

NEIL exits through the front door.

TIM: Well... thought he might not... Not from me. Proud man, Neil. He's still licking his wounds after what happened. He'll be fine. Give him time. Similar thing happened to a colleague of mine: Lenny. He was in business before he joined us – partnership with an old school friend. Built the business from scratch. His friend – partner – took him to the cleaners – quite literally: it was an office sanitation company. Ran off with his wife too – just to rub salt into the wounds. He was out of action for a while – Lenny – before he turned it around and came to work for us. He's a key player now, couldn't do without him.

HILARY: I sometimes wonder if *I'm* the problem.

TIM: You?

HILARY: Perhaps I'm too... I don't know, perhaps he needs someone who can... motivate him more perhaps – be more... inspiring for him.

TIM: No, you're not to think like that, Hils, you're his rock, his anchor, he'd be lost without you, Neil would. Tricky time, but you'll get through it, you'll get through it. Still, don't let that swine get away with it though – Jerry. I'll happily help you out there – if there's anything I can do. Just say the word. (*TIM yawns.*) Excuse me. This country air, not used to it. (*Wine.*) Coupled with this – and a most delicious ratatouille – a lethal combination. How you finding that?

HILARY: It's lovely.

TIM: It's staring to open up a bit.

HILARY: I met someone, Tim.

TIM: What's that?

HILARY: A man.

TIM: Ah.

HILARY: No, it's... nothing – I mean nothing's 'happened' between us,

that is. Just a couple of dinners together, things like that. Although he's... keen something might.

TIM: He knows about Neil?

HILARY: Yes, he knows about Neil, told him all about Neil. Richard. I met him at work – one of the events. He lost his wife a couple of years ago in a skiing accident.

TIM: Ah. Whereabouts?

HILARY: The Pyrenees, I think he said.

TIM: Yes can be treacherous down there.

HILARY: Went through a very bad time after. Hit the drink and... Well... He said he actually thought about...

TIM: Hm?

HILARY: You know...

TIM: Oh yes. Sure.

HILARY: On more than one occasion. Said he might have done if it wasn't for Tom – his son. Then one day – he said – he had this... epiphany. He knew he could carry on punishing himself for what happened, blaming... life, God – whoever, or he could instead choose to remember all the good things about Helen – the wonderful things – be thankful for what they had and... move on. He knew that's what she would have wanted too, for him to live, be happy... find someone else, children again perhaps – a child, if he found the right person. Well, he thinks he has. Like I say, he knows I'm with Neil. He said he'd wait until I... Neil and I need to talk. He needs to be clear about what he wants. We both do. But talking to Neil's not that... not at the moment. Well... I can't say it's unpleasant anyway to get the attention from someone – a man – who thinks I'm interesting... attractive – beautiful... witty...

TIM snores.

(To herself.) ...fun to be with.

HILARY goes to the window and looks out. She closes it and crosses to the mirror and checks herself. She takes a good sip from her glass before picking up the unopened bottle and exiting through the front door, closing it behind her.

Lights down. Sounds of the party: music, cheering and general revelry is heard during the blackout.

Scene 3

The following morning. 10.30 a.m.

Sound of dog barking off.

SAMMY: (Off.) Jip! Stay there, Jip! Sit boy! Sit!

SAMMY opens the front door.

Knock knock.

TIM enters from upstairs.

TIM: Morning, Uncle Sammy.

SAMMY: Timothy.

TIM: Another cracker by the looks of it.

SAMMY: You alone?

TIM: It appears so.

SAMMY: I'll bring up the paperwork then, if it's convenient.

TIM: Sure. I was hoping to be glued to a scintillating final day of the test match, but England have managed to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory... once more.

SAMMY: Any trouble for you last night?

TIM: Trouble?

SAMMY: Disturbances outside?

TIM: Think I heard an owl at one point, but apart from that all blissfully quiet – outside *and* inside for that matter. Why do you ask?

SAMMY: There was somebody around my place last night – again. Jip were barking, he knew it too.

TIM: What time was this?

SAMMY: Early morning, before sunrise. I went out with my gun, but didn't see no-one.

TIM: Not loaded I hope?

SAMMY: Not much use otherwise.

TIM: I'd be careful about going round with loaded guns, Uncle Sammy, last time I checked there was still a law against shooting people.

SAMMY: Just put the fear of God into 'em, that's all. Make sure they didn't come back. Police don't do nothing. Bigger fish to fry they say. Well if they won't fry 'em I will. Vandalising the crops too. Alan Roper's had two of them things in his fields already this year. It's people's livelihoods they're messing with. There were evidence outside my place this morning.

TIM: Evidence?

SAMMY: Of someone. There were signs.

TIM: What kind of signs?

SAMMY: Meaningless signs. Stones placed on top of one another, sticks in the ground. Someone just trying to spook me. Well two can play at that game. I'll spook 'em back with my gun. I expect you to deal firmly with them, Timothy, once you take on this place. We need to protect what's ours.

TIM: I'll do what's necessary.

SAMMY: Good.

TIM: Within the law.

SAMMY: *(Scornfully.)* The law.

SAMMY starts to cough. He takes out his hip flask.

TIM: You okay, Uncle Sammy? Let me get you some water?

SAMMY: Don't bother, that don't help. This does.

He takes a swig.

TIM: Have you seen your doctor about that?

SAMMY: *(Flask.)* This is my doctor, I consult him regularly. I'll be back with the paperwork.

SAMMY exits through the front door. Sound of dog

barking.

Jip! Get going! Get going, boy!

TIM checks his mobile. He then crosses to the window and opens both sides. He begins to clear up the glasses etc. in the room. He picks up the half finished bottle and looks around for the unopened one before exiting into the kitchen. KELLY appears outside the window. She looks in. She exits from the window and appears at the front door. She holds a bakery bag.

KELLY: Hello?

TIM enters from the kitchen.

TIM: Hello?

KELLY: You must be Tim.

TIM: You must be...?

KELLY: Kelly. I'm guessing they're not back then.

TIM: They?

KELLY: Linda, Hils, Nad.

TIM: Haven't seen anyone.

KELLY: You didn't come – to the party last night.

TIM: Wasn't invited.

KELLY: You were by me.

TIM: Lost in communication.

KELLY: I've brought breakfast. Want one?

TIM: I'm good thanks.

KELLY: Nad went to get them dressed up for today.

TIM: Today?

KELLY: Midsummer's Day. He took them to a shop in the village to get some outfits.

TIM: Boyfriend – Nad?

KELLY: Friend. Is that your car outside?

TIM: Which one?

KELLY: The shiny, green, sporty one.

TIM: It is.

KELLY: Looks expensive.

TIM: It was.

KELLY: Mind if I wait in here?

TIM: Be my guest.

KELLY: Thanks. Mind if I sit down?

TIM gestures to a seat.

She likes to have fun, doesn't she, Linda.

TIM: She does – under the right circumstances.

KELLY: I guess they were right for her last night. Dancing away she was. No-one could keep up with her – except Nad. Hils likes to have fun too.

TIM: She was there too?

KELLY: She was.

TIM: Neil, was he there?

KELLY: No. Sure you don't want one of these, they're good. Just don't take the one with chocolate in it – it's Nad's favourite.

TIM: Still no, thanks. You don't sound local.

KELLY: I'm not.

TIM: Where are you from then?

KELLY: Dagenham, originally – anywhere else but since.

TIM: Traveller?

KELLY: Free spirit.

TIM: Good work if you can get it.

KELLY: Suits me.

TIM: How do you get by?

KELLY: I get by.

TIM: What do you do for money – if that’s not rude to ask?

KELLY: It is, but I work. Earn it when I need to, doing this and that, here and there.

TIM: And your family?

KELLY: What about them?

TIM: What do think about this free spirit lifestyle of yours?

KELLY: No idea. Haven’t seen them since I was fifteen.

TIM: You’ve spoken to them presumably.

KELLY: Uh uh.

TIM: You don’t think they might be concerned about you?

KELLY: They’ve got enough problems of their own to be concerned about. That’s why I left.

TIM: Okay, won’t pry.

KELLY: Best not.

TIM: What brings you this way – if I’m allowed to ask that?

KELLY: You are. The magic. The formations – crop circles.

TIM: Ah.

KELLY: Know about them?

TIM: I do. And I also know that not everyone’s as excited about them as you are.

KELLY: Then they’re missing out.

TIM: One person’s magic is another’s source of annoyance and frustration.

KELLY: It's their loss.

TIM: Loss of revenue.

KELLY: Loss of wonder.

TIM: Again that's arguable.

KELLY: You ever been in one?

TIM: Can't say I have.

KELLY: Maybe you should, might change your mind about them.

TIM: It's not me who's got the problem with them, I don't farm the land.

KELLY: I can take you in one if you want.

TIM: Now there's an offer.

KELLY: There's a new one happened this morning, we're all going there after breakfast – come along too. I'm inviting you.

TIM: Happened?

KELLY: Yes.

TIM: Made by humans, aren't they?

KELLY: The shit ones are, not the good ones. The good ones are too perfect – and too quick.

TIM: Quick?

KELLY: Yeah. You'd be up on a hill somewhere looking down on a field – nothing. You go away for half an hour – sometimes less – and then come back to the same place and they'd be one there – big one sometimes – over ten trams wide – intricate too. Would've taken people hours and hours and hours to make. Also no-one catches anyone making them – the good one's, I mean. It's like they know when no-one's looking.

TIM: Little green men?

KELLY: That's racist.

TIM: Is that what you think?

KELLY: Might not be green or little.

TIM: ET's though?

KELLY: Why not? There's millions of billions of trillions of stars up there. Bit arrogant of us to think we're the only one's around isn't it.

TIM: We might be a one off failed experiment... by a one off failed God.

KELLY: What happened to you, Tim?

TIM: I grew up.

KELLY: Grew cynical.

TIM: Perhaps the same thing.

KELLY: I disagree.

TIM: You haven't grown up yet. Come back to me in ten years time.

KELLY: I've grown up.

TIM: Also England have just loss a test match, you've caught me on a bad day.

KELLY: I'll cheer you up. You like to travel, Tim?

TIM: When I can.

KELLY: Where's the best place you've ever been?

TIM: Ever?

KELLY: Ever ever.

TIM: Ever ever. Probably have to say Italy – the Amalfi Coast. Been there?

KELLY: Never heard of it.

TIM: Italy or the Amalfi Coast?

KELLY jokingly gives TIM the finger.

KELLY: Tell me about it.

TIM: The Amalfi Coast.

KELLY: Your holiday, I don't need a geography lesson.

TIM: What do you want to know?

KELLY: When you went? Who you went with? What you did there?

TIM: Okay. I was about your age. I went with a girl – Francesca.

KELLY: Girlfriend?

TIM: Yes. Her uncle had a house there. He was away on business, so he let us use it. Beautiful little fishing village. Unspoilt – was back then, hopefully still is.

KELLY: You never been back?

TIM: No.

KELLY: Go on.

TIM: We didn't do that much – sightseeing I mean.

KELLY: Made your own entertainment.

TIM: We did. We used to sit out on the terrace of an evening, drinking cheap Italian plonk, watching the sun set on the fishing boats bobbing in the water.

KELLY: Sounds like paradise.

TIM: It was.

KELLY: I'd like to go.

TIM: You should.

KELLY: What happened to Francesca?

TIM: God knows, probably married with a hoard of bambinos by now.

SAMMY appears at the open front door, without Jip. He carries an old briefcase.

SAMMY: Knock, knock.

TIM: Uncle Sammy.

SAMMY: What's this, visitors?

TIM: This is Kelly, Uncle Sammy, she just dropped in to say hello.

SAMMY: What does she want?

KELLY: She wants to say hello.

SAMMY: I'm not talking to you, I'm talking to Timothy. I suppose you know nothing about that thing in Mr Roper's field this morning.

KELLY: Are you talking to me or are you talking to Timothy?

SAMMY: I'm talking to you, young lady.

KELLY: No I don't, old man, but if you're meaning the crop circle –

SAMMY: (*Derisively.*) Crop circle! It may be fun 'n games to you, but it's people's livelihoods your messing with.

KELLY: Excuse me?

TIM: Look –

KELLY: If you think it's anything to do with me you're wrong.

SAMMY: You and your accomplices.

KELLY: No.

SAMMY: I'll catch you at it one of these days. I'll have my gun. You'll be sorry.

KELLY: Will I?

SAMMY: You will. You all will. I don't care if there is a law against it.

TIM: Listen –

KELLY: You stupid old sod.

TIM: Now, Kelly –

SAMMY: What did you call me?

KELLY: An old sod – a stupid one.

TIM: Kelly –

SAMMY: I'll 'ave you!

TIM: Uncle Sammy –

SAMMY: No-one speaks to me like that – not I'm my house, not anywhere!

SAMMY grabs the fire poker.

KELLY: Come on then! Come on!

TIM: Kelly, Uncle Sammy –

KELLY: Anyway it's his house not yours.

SAMMY: It's my house and I want you out of it! Out of it now!

KELLY: Fuck off, you old fart, I don't take orders from you.

SAMMY: Why you –

TIM: Kelly! Uncle Sammy –

SAMMY: I'll kill her! I'll –

SAMMY starts coughing and wheezing.

KELLY: Come on! Come on then!

TIM: Kelly just... Uncle Sammy. Give me that! Just give me...

SAMMY throws the poker down. He takes out his hip flask and drinks.

SAMMY: I'll be back, back with my gun. You're vermin, you all are.

KELLY: You're vermin.

TIM: Kelly.

SAMMY: I'll 'ave the lot of you. I want her out of here, Timothy. Out, now!

SAMMY exits through the front door.

KELLY: He's your uncle? Poor you.

TIM: Probably wasn't a good idea to chuck rocks at the hornet's nest.

KELLY: He started it. Stupid old sod. I thought this was your place.

TIM: It's in negotiation. Might have set things back a little after this.

Told you not everyone was too excited about them. Well you can certainly give as good as you get, Kelly.

KELLY: Grown up enough for ya?

TIM: Sure.

TIM replaces the poker back with the rest of the fire irons.

I must say, they don't seem to be in too much of a hurry for their breakfast, do they.

KELLY: I bet that's where he's taken them – the new one. Well if he has, sod him, I don't care.

TIM: Sounds like you do.

KELLY: Well I don't.

TIM: You sure he's not your boyfriend?

KELLY: Positive. We'll if they've gone there perhaps you should take me to your place.

TIM: My place?

KELLY: Your place in Italy.

TIM: Bit of a schlep in one afternoon, I'm afraid.

KELLY: Who's talking about one afternoon?

TIM: We're not?

KELLY: I'm not.

TIM: No?

KELLY: We can get in your car – your, shiny, green, sporty one and we can drive there. If we need to stop we can sleep in the car or stay in a hotel – if you're paying.

TIM: Definitely need to be a hotel.

KELLY: Okay. The next day we'll carry on driving till we get there. When we're there we'll spend a couple of days looking around – or however long we want to. We might even bump into Francesca and her hoard of bambinos.

TIM: Probably best if we didn't.

KELLY: When we've had enough we can drive home. If I want to stay you can leave me down there. What do you say?

TIM: You're serious aren't you?

KELLY: Yes.

TIM: You don't know me from Adam.

KELLY: You're Tim.

TIM: I could be a raging sex pervert for all you know.

KELLY: So could I. It's a risk we'll both have to take.

TIM: Well... I must say it's a tempting offer. There might be certain objections to the idea from certain individuals I know.

KELLY: Linda?

TIM: She's one of the individuals that springs to mind.

KELLY: She seems to be having enough fun without you.

TIM: With Nad.

KELLY: Without you.

TIM: This your way of getting back at him – running away to Italy with me?

KELLY: Who's running away? I'm moving on. No can do? (*Bakery bag.*) Here you might as well keep these.

TIM: You're not waiting around for them.

KELLY: No, I'm not. Besides that old bastard might be back with his gun. I'm tough, but not stupid.

There is a thud from upstairs.

NEIL: (*Off.*) Ow! (*Followed by a groan.*)

TIM: Sounds like Neil's up.

KELLY takes a pastry from the bag. The chocolate filled one.

KELLY: Nice to meet you, Tim. Have a nice holiday... life.

KELLY crosses to the front door.

TIM: Listen... Kelly, if you want to go for a drive somewhere – in that shiny, green, sports car out there, I'd be happy to oblige. Can't promise Italy, but perhaps somewhere a little more local. We can put the roof down, feel the wind in our hair as we zip up and down some country lanes. Could even stop for breakfast somewhere – a proper one – or lunch perhaps. On me of course.

KELLY: Aren't you worried about your uncle seeing us?

TIM: If he does, I'll tell him I'm escorting you off the premises. He'll be delighted.

KELLY: Okay.

TIM: No need to lock up since Neil's here. I'm presuming it's him up there. Adiamo.

KELLY: What does that mean?

TIM: Let's go.

They exit through the front door, closing it behind them. They pass by the window. Sound of car doors opening and closing, engine starting up, a couple of throaty revs and the car pulling away and into the distance. NAD appears outside the window. He briefly looks in and exits from the window. The front door opens. NAD enters. He surveys the room briefly. He looks up to the picture above the fireplace. He takes a chair and places it below the picture. He is about to climb on it when he hears NEIL descending the stairs. He sits on the chair instead. NEIL enters from upstairs. He is dressed.

NAD: Hi.

NEIL: Who are you?

NAD: Nad. Neil, right?

NEIL: What do you want?

NAD: It's okay I've been invited.

NEIL: Who by?

NAD: Hils, Linda.

NEIL: Where are they?

NAD: I left them both in it soaking up the sunshine – the new one, crop circle. (*Bakery bag.*) Kelly’s obviously been here – unless that’s yours. Is it?

NEIL: What?

NAD: Yours?

NEIL: No.

NAD: She must’ve got bored waiting. We were longer than we thought. Not my fault, they wanted to see it – well, Linda insisted. They got themselves kitted out for today like a couple of earth goddesses. They look great. Another scorcher. I love the sun, don’t you? Everyone’s a lot more relaxed – stripping off, having fun. Except when you’re stuck in traffic, eh, not so good then.

NEIL rubs his shoulder.

Bad shoulder? I do a good massage if you want. I studied it for a while – know all the core muscles. People say I’m good.

NEIL: No... thanks.

NAD: You missed a fun party last night. Linda’s a livewire, isn’t she. Really going for it she was. Hils was too.

NEIL: She was there?

NAD: That’s right, she ran off without telling you, didn’t she. Naughty. No, Hils was definitely there.

NEIL: Her name’s Hilary.

NAD: Sorry, it’s just that she introduced herself to me as Hils. Tim not around I’m guessing.

NEIL: Probably.

NAD: What car does he drive, blue... Volkswagen Polo is it? It’s the only one out there. You do look in pain. You sure I can’t –

NEIL: No... thanks.

NAD: Just say the word.

NAD has taken out his Zippo lighter. He flicks the lid.

Zippo. Good lighters. Reliable. This one was made in Niagara Falls. They used them in the US army during World War Two and Vietnam. Soldiers liked them 'cos they hardly blew out in bad weather.

NAD blows on the side to demonstrate. The flame doesn't go out.

See. Secret... if you blow them from the top...

NAD does so. The flame is extinguished.

Just need to know its weakness.

NEIL: Look, what is it you want?

NAD: I don't want anything – apart from wanting to wait for them. I can wait outside if you don't feel comfortable with me... But don't worry, I'm not dangerous... only when I haven't been fed. (*Looking in bakery bag.*) Aw, she didn't buy my favourite... unless she's eaten it. Good bakery this one. Want one?

NEIL declines.

No, can't wait for you to see what they're wearing. Hopefully they haven't run off with a couple of ET's... the one's who made the crop circle. They get a bad rap don't they, those guys, the way they're depicted... by Hollywood mainly. Always the baddies. When in truth we're the baddies really, for the most part – us humans. But it's what we do, isn't it, project all our own shit onto others. We don't like to be held accountable for anything. It doesn't matter what we do so long as we can get away with it. Not everyone's like that – thank God – there's enough humans around with a bit of a conscience. I guess they know what goes around comes around – sooner or later. I believe in that: karma, retribution... call it what you will. Like your business partner for instance – ex business partner.

NEIL: What about him?

NAD: He'll get what's coming to him.

NEIL: It's none of your business.

NAD: I know, but Hils – sorry, Hilary – wanted to tell me about it – him.

- NEIL: It's still none of your business.
- NAD: I hear you, but it would've been uncivil of me not to lend a sympathetic ear. Anyway, he's just a case in point – I'm not meaning him specifically. Here, here's a good story – to illustrate it – you'll like this, I did. There was this kid I used to know at school. Little skinny kid. Always got picked on. Not academic, not sporty, not anything really. Tell a lie, he was a good runner, I guess he had to be to get away from the bullies. What one would call an outsider. I came across him once – in the summer holidays – he was sitting in the woods, alone, on a tree stump – crying. Normally I would've just carried on, not bothered him, but something made me stay and ask him what the matter was. He lifted his shirt and showed me bruises he had. Big nasty ones – on his back, stomach... arms. Burn marks even from... God knows what. I asked him if it was one of the bullies that had done it. He said it was his old man. He used to beat him regularly. He'd lay into him for little things, trivial things, misplacing stuff, tying his shoelaces up wrong... things like that – he said. Also – the kid said – his old man didn't think he was his – his own son – he believed his mum had done the dirty with a mutual friend. His mum had died a couple of years earlier. It sounded like she was the one protecting him from the brutality of the old bastard. And now she was gone it was open season on the kid.
- NEIL: Did you report it?
- NAD: No.
- NEIL: Why not?
- NAD: I just didn't.
- NEIL: You should've done.
- NAD: Yes, I know I should've done, but I didn't. Anyway that's not the point of the story. One day the kid stopped coming to school. We heard he'd run away from home. He was never found.
- NEIL: Is that it?
- NAD: No, that's not it, we're just getting to the good bit. Some years later – an old school friend told me – the kid came back. He was no longer the skinny little kid he was at school. He'd grown... strong. Life had given him some kicks, no doubt, but nothing compared to what the old man had given him, I should imagine. He showed up in the old man's house. I guess the old man was in little doubt as to what he had in mind.

NEIL: What did he do – the kid?

NAD: He picked out a poker from the set of fire irons, raised it high above his head and it brought it down on the old fucker's skull – hard

NEIL: Killed him?

NAD: He wasn't coming back after that.

NEIL: And...?

NAD: And what?

NEIL: What happened to him – the kid?

NAD: Made peace with himself I should imagine.

NEIL: I doubt it.

NAD: Why not?

NEIL: Murderers don't find peace.

NAD: How do you know?

NEIL: They just don't.

NAD: Have you ever murdered anyone?

NEIL: No.

NAD: Then you don't know. Anyway, it wasn't murder it was retribution.

NEIL: Still murder – in the eyes of the law.

NAD: The eyes of the law squints up its own backside. The law had no idea what that kid went through. And neither do you. Okay, what would you have done then, come back, kissed and made up?

NEIL: No, I would've reported him. Done things legally, lawfully.

NAD: Really?

NEIL: Yes, I would.

NAD: Well, he didn't, he chose to kill the old fucker, put an end to

him.

NEIL: So what happened to him?

NAD: He disappeared again. No one's heard from him since. I bet you've thought about it though.

NEIL: What?

NAD: Taking a poker to his head – your ex business partner's.

NEIL: No.

NAD: No?

NEIL: No. I said I don't want to talk about him.

NAD: Okay.

NAD flicks the lid of the Zippo a couple of times.

Oh, I think there's something you ought to know. I wasn't going to say anything, but since we're striking up a bit of a friendship.

NEIL: What?

NAD: Do you know somebody called Richard?

NEIL: No.

NAD: Someone Hils – sorry, Hilary – works with?

NEIL: No, what about him?

NAD: She was talking about him during our heart to heart last night. It sounds like he's a little keen – romantically speaking I mean. And by the sound of it – just reading between the lines of what she was saying – it might not be just all one way traffic.

NEIL: Why, what's she been telling you?

NAD: It's okay, I don't think anything's... 'happened' – yet – between them. But, as a friend, my advice is you might want to start showing her a little bit more... 'attention' – if you get my meaning, Neil.

NEIL: Look, if you're –

NAD: Hey, don't shoot the messenger. I'm just letting you know

you've got a little bit of competition to watch out for, that's all.

HILARY: (Off.) Yes, the winner!

LINDA: (Off.) Ah! Cheating bitch!

NAD: Sounds like the Goddesses are back.

HILARY appears at the front door. She is flushed and breathless from the run. She is dressed in a rustic outfit, cornstalks, flowers in her hair perhaps. She carries her other clothes in another bag.

HILARY: Here we are!

NAD: Hey, hey!

LINDA appears at the front door behind HILARY, flushed and even more breathless. She is also dressed in a rustic outfit etc. and carries her other clothes in another bag.

Well, what do you think, Neil, don't they look something?

Blackout.

Act 2

Scene 1

The action continues from Act 1.

LINDA: You definitely cheated!

HILARY: No I didn't.

LINDA: You set off before I said three.

HILARY: No, I left on three.

LINDA: You didn't. I demand a rerun.

HILARY: Anytime.

LINDA: Well, Neil, what do you think of us, don't we look amazing?
Better say yes.

NAD: He's struck dumb by your beauty.

LINDA: Right answer. Is *he* around? I don't see his car.

NAD: Haven't seen him.

LINDA: Good, the fun can continue. I'm in the mood for something
cool, wet and refreshing and I think I know just the thing. Don't
go away.

NAD: We won't.

LINDA exits into the kitchen.

We wondered what was taking you.

HILARY: We decided to go up to the top.

NAD: Ah, that would explain it.

HILARY: You're right, the view of it up there is amazing.

NAD: Tell me what you saw.

HILARY: Yes, definitely a tree, one half of it in leaf the other half bare.

NAD: Summer and winter.

HILARY: The Oak and the Holly King.

NAD: Right.

HILARY: I had no idea they were so big.

NAD: They come much bigger than that – although that one’s certainly not small. You should take Neil to see it.

NEIL: You didn’t say.

HILARY: Say what?

NEIL: You were going off – last night.

HILARY: You’d gone off yourself, remember.

NEIL: I was outside.

HILARY: I didn’t see you.

NEIL: Did you look?

NAD: He missed you. We missed Kelly too. She left us breakfast.

HILARY: Oh, I feel bad.

NAD: She’ll live. Hey, maybe she’s gone off with Tim somewhere.

LINDA enters from the kitchen with a bottle of white wine and four glasses.

LINDA: This should do the trick. You’ve been chatting to Nad, Neil. He’s a mine of information, knows just about everything about everything.

NAD: Hardly.

LINDA: He’s modest too.

LINDA gives the bottle to NAD to open. (Screw top.)

Monsieur. He speaks French too.

NAD: Just the essentials: putain, baiser, foutre, connard – just enough to get by.

LINDA: He’s also been telling us all about Litha. What’s Litha, I hear you ask, Neil? It’s the midsummer celebration. Hence our rustic attire. Litha’s part of the pagan calendar.

NAD: Celtic.

LINDA: Celtic.

NAD hands a glass to HILARY.

HILARY: Thanks.

NAD offers a glass to NEIL.

NEIL: No thanks, bit early for me.

LINDA: It's the Feast of Litha, Neil, rejoice.

NAD: I'll put it here if you change your mind.

NEIL: *(To HILARY.)* Can we talk?

HILARY: Yes.

NEIL: Alone.

HILARY: Not now. I'm joining in with the fun – being sociable.

LINDA: Yes come and be sociable with us, Neil, join in with the fun.
(Toasting.) To Litha.

HILARY: To Litha.

NAD: Litha. Perhaps one of you Goddesses might like to tell Neil the story of the two Kings.

LINDA: This Goddess will tell it. Are you standing comfortably, Neil? Then I'll begin. There's these two king's: the Oak King, ruler of the summer and the Holly King, ruler of the winter. Being arch enemies they love to fight.

NAD: Not all the time, twice a year.

LINDA: Twice a year. Once in midsummer: Litha, when the Oak King is at his mightiest and once in midwinter: Yule, when the Holly King is at his mightiest. Of course it's an unfair contest because one of the Kings is powerful and the other is a puny little thing. But every time they fight the puny one does manage to get one of his branches – or thorns – lodged into the bark of his rival before scurrying off back into the woods.

HILARY: They're fighting for possession of the Goddess: Nature.

LINDA: I'm coming to that. Let me tell the story, you can supply the footnotes when I'm finished. They're fighting for possession of the Goddess: Nature, Neil. They're mad for her and they're prepared to kill or be killed for her – except neither ever actually die, they just grow weak from their festering wound. The victor wins the Goddess and he enjoys her – and she enjoys him – until he becomes too weak and is unable to function and so she goes off with the other one who is now growing strong and virile – the Holly King in the autumn –

HILARY: Lughnasa.

LINDA: Lughnasa. And the Oak King in the spring –

HILARY: Beltane.

LINDA: Belt up, Beltane. And so the cycle continues ad infinitum.

NAD: Bravo!

LINDA: Did I tell it well?

NAD: Magnificently.

LINDA: Thank you. Well, Neil, what do you think?

NAD: Sounds a bit of a slut to me – this Goddess.

LINDA: Just doing what's necessary to keep things going. We wouldn't want nature to grind to a standstill, would we.

NAD: We used to act it out – when I was growing up. Got a bit hairy at times – depending on what was used for weapons.

LINDA: Is that where you got your scars?

NAD: Some of them perhaps. We were gonna do it last night in fact.

HILARY: Why didn't you?

NAD: We were distracted by visitors.

LINDA: Who?

NAD: You.

LINDA: Oh yes.

HILARY: We'd have liked to have watched it, wouldn't we Linda?

LINDA: We would. Nad's got an amazing tattoo. Show Neil your tattoo, Nad.

NAD: I'm sure he doesn't want to see it.

LINDA: He does. Well Hils and I do again. Come on, lift up.

NAD shows his tattoo.

Look at that, Neil. Impressed? What do you call it again?

NAD: An ouroboros.

LINDA: It's symbolic of a snake devouring it's own tail.

NAD: It's symbolic of time – birth, death – the cycle of life. The snake's the symbol.

LINDA: Amazing.

NAD: Any of you got one?

LINDA: Not me. I don't do pain, I'm afraid, only pleasure.

NAD: It's not that bad. Hils, you got any?

HILARY: No.

NAD: Like one?

HILARY: Perhaps. A small one. A butterfly or something on my ankle or shoulder.

NAD: Nice. Neil?

NEIL: What?

NAD: You got any?

NEIL: No.

NAD: Like one?

NEIL: No.

NAD: Well if you do, Hils, make sure you get it done by someone who knows what they're doing. Not like a friend of mine, Roly. He went to someone who was clearly no artist – couldn't spell either. Roly tried to burn it off after with something or other – made a right mess. And don't drink then ink – number one rule.

LINDA: Well no-one's inking today so we can carry on drinking. Top up, please, monsieur.

NAD tops up LINDA's glass.

NEIL: *(To HILARY.)* Can we go now?

HILARY: No, I'm still being sociable.

NAD: Hils?

HILARY: Thanks.

NAD tops up HILARY's glass.

I've got an idea.

NAD: What's that?

HILARY: Why don't we do it – since you didn't do it last night – act it out – the story of the Oak and Holly Kings.

LINDA: Good idea. We've got everyone here – all the characters: the two Kings, the Goddess: me

HILARY: And me.

LINDA: There's only one goddess. I bagged her first.

HILARY: We can share the part. Nad?

NAD: We could. If everyone's up for it.

LINDA: I am.

NAD: Neil?

NEIL: What?

NAD: You up for it?

NEIL: No.

LINDA: Come on, Neil, we can't do it without the two Kings. Nad, you can be my Summer King, Neil can be the Holly.

NEIL: I'm going out.

LINDA: Boo hiss!

NEIL: (To HILARY.) Are you coming?

HILARY: I want you to stay and join in, Neil. (Firmly.) I mean it, Neil, I would like you to stay and join in.

NAD: He's swithering.

LINDA: He's in. Hoorah for the Holly King!

HILARY: What do we need to do?

NAD: First we need to prepare the space, make our clearing in the Great Wood. (Sofa.) Give me a hand with this someone. Neil?

NEIL: I've got a bad shoulder.

LINDA: I hope it gets better for the fight.

NEIL: I'm not fighting anyone.

NAD: It's just playacting, that's all.

NEIL: I'm not an actor.

LINDA: None of us are actors, we're just having fun.

NAD: There's little acting involved – especially for the Holly King. All he needs to do is to skulk around in the shadows looking moody.

LINDA: There, Neil, it's a part made for you.

NAD: Someone take the other end of this.

HILARY: Here, let me.

HILARY and NAD move the sofa away. They move the rest of the furniture to create a space.

NAD: Okay, here we have our clearing in the Great Wood.

LINDA: What now?

NAD: We call on the Spirits of Midsummer and raise our vessels to toast to them.

LINDA: Let me top up first.

NEIL: I hope this isn't black magic. I'm not doing black magic.

LINDA: We're just toasting to the Spirits of Midsummer, Neil, that's all.

NAD: It's not black magic, Neil. We raise our vessels to the Spirits of Midsummer.

LINDA: To the Spirits of Midsummer.

HILARY: To the Spirits of Midsummer.

They drink.

LINDA: See, no one's been struck dead yet.

NAD: Vessels away.

HILARY: What now?

NAD: We form a circle round the edge of the clearing. Spread out. Okay, each of us in turn will step in, announce ourselves – tell everyone who we are – our qualities, and why we're here.

LINDA: Me first, the Goddess.

NAD: No, there's an order. The Oak King's first. It's the height of midsummer and the Oak King steps into the clearing. I am the Oak King, King of the Summer and now ruler of the Great Wood.

LINDA: Hurrah!

NAD: See my sturdy trunk.

LINDA: We do.

NAD: My powerful branches reach up to the sky.

LINDA: Yes!

NAD: I am here to sport with my Goddess: Nature.

LINDA: Me.

NAD: The Oak King steps from the clearing.

LINDA: Hurrah for the Oak King! Is it me now?

NAD: No, we need to hear from his rival the Holly King? Step into the clearing, Holly King.

LINDA: That's you.

NAD: He knows.

HILARY: Go on, Holly King.

NAD: Tell us who you are.

NEIL: The Holly King.

LINDA: We've gathered that.

NEIL: Look –

NAD: Tell us some of your qualities. Think winter.

NEIL: Icy... cold... frosty.

NAD: Good. And why are you here?

NEIL: No idea.

NAD: To do battle with the Great Oak.

NEIL: I'm not fighting.

LINDA: You'll never win your Goddess back with that attitude.

NAD: No, he's toying with me, lulling me into a false sense of security. I better watch my back.

NEIL: I'm not fighting.

NAD: Playacting, Neil. Good, Holly King, step from clearing.

HILARY: Hooray for the Holly King!

NAD: Hurrah! Your turn, Goddess.

LINDA: At last. The Goddess steps into the clearing. I am nature and everything in it. And what's more I am the lover to the Oak King.

NAD: And the Holly King – potentially.

LINDA: True, but now it's summer so it's you and me big boy. The two Kings are mad for me and they jealously fight over me. You can see why. Who wouldn't fight over such a magnificent creature like me?

NAD: That's good Goddess. Step from the clearing.

LINDA: I was just getting started.

NAD: We need to hear from the other Goddess.

LINDA: There can only be one Goddess. having two would make a mockery of the story surely.

HILARY: Don't worry, I'll be something else. I'll be All the Creatures of the Great Wood then.

LINDA: Well, technically that's me too – but I'll let you have them.

HILARY: Thanks, most generous of you Goddess.

LINDA: Think not on it.

NAD: Step into the clearing All the Creatures of the Great Wood.

LINDA: Perhaps a hurrah for the departing Goddess first.

NAD: Hurrah for the Goddess!

HILARY: Hurrah!

LINDA: Thanks.

HILARY: I am All the Creatures of the Great Wood. Whether feather, fur, fin or scale –

LINDA: Fin?

HILARY: There are fish... in streams.

LINDA: Conceded.

HILARY: Thank you. From the smallest to the greatest creature am I: the tiny vole, the hedgehog, the badger, the fox, the great stag – the birds of the air too: the hovering hawk, the hammering woodpecker, the night hunting owl –

LINDA: We're not going to go through them all, are we?

HILARY: No.

LINDA: It's just that there's a battle to be fought before the autumn.

NAD: That's good All the Creatures of the Great Wood, step from the clearing. Hurrah for All the Creatures of the Great Wood!

LINDA: Hurrah!

NAD: Okay, we've announced ourselves and told everyone who we are and why we're here.

LINDA: Let the battle commence!

NAD: Not yet. We need to set the scene by taking our places in the Great Wood.

LINDA: Another quick toast to the Spirits of Midsummer methinks.

LINDA takes another drink.

NAD: Holly King you'll need to hide somewhere. Somewhere I can't see you.

HILARY: *(Coffee table.)* Here, Neil, behind here.

NAD: Holly King.

HILARY: Sorry – Holly King.

HILARY upends the coffee table.

Behind this table – sorry, thicket of trees.

NAD: That's good. Hide, Holly King.

NEIL stands behind the coffee table.

I can still see you.

NEIL crouches behind the table.

Good.

LINDA: Where shall I be?

TIM: Here in the clearing with me.

LINDA: Okay.

HILARY: And me?

LINDA: Find a perch somewhere.

NAD: You can come in in a moment. Okay, the Great Oak King stands in the clearing of the Great Wood and proudly surveys

his kingdom. It's midsummer and he is at his mightiest. His Goddess, Nature, is with him.

LINDA: She is.

NAD: He enjoys her as she moves as the warming breeze about his branches.

LINDA moves around NAD.

LINDA: And she enjoys him.

NAD: He is intoxicated by her fragrance of summer flowers.

LINDA: My heady perfume.

NAD: All the Creatures of the Great Wood play in and around the clearing.

LINDA: Not all of them hopefully, it'll get a little crowded.

HILARY: A busy squirrel hops into the clearing. She forages about the roots of the Great Oak searching for hidden acorns.

LINDA: Careful, busy squirrel, don't get too close or you might get your busy paws trodden on by the Goddess.

HILARY: Then the Goddess should look where she's treading, shouldn't she.

LINDA: A talking squirrel, how quaint!

NAD: However, in this idyllic scene all is not well. In a nearby thicket of trees, the Great Oak's rival – the Holly King – looks on jealously.

LINDA: Boo hiss!

NAD: Try not to take sides, Goddess. Holly King are you looking on jealously?

NEIL steps out.

But don't let me see you!

NEIL: What do you want me to do?

LINDA: Look on jealously.

NEIL: If nobody sees me there's not much point, is there.

NAD: It's for your audience.

NEIL: What audience?

NAD: Usually there's people watching. Hide.

NEIL hides again.

Behind a thicket of trees, the Holly King looks on jealously. It's been precisely six months since he last did battle with the Oak King and three months since the Oak stole away his Goddess. He knows he's no match for his rival, but all he needs to do is get one of his thorns lodged into his enemy's bark and his job here will be done.

There is the sound of a car approaching.

LINDA: Ah, fun over.

HILARY goes to the window.

HILARY: It's Tim. It looks like Kelly's with him.

LINDA: Surprise surprise. *(Wine.)* We'll be needing some more of this.

LINDA exits into the kitchen. Sound of car doors opening and closing.

NEIL: *(To HILARY.)* Can we go now?

HILARY: I want to say hello to Tim.

NAD looks pensive.

Everything okay, Nad?

NAD: Sure.

TIM appears outside the window.

TIM: Hello in here?

HILARY: Hi, Tim.

TIM: Hils, look at you. Kelly said you'd dressed up. Rearranging the furniture?

HILARY: We're doing a play.

TIM: Ah, theatricals eh? Mind if we come in and watch? We'll sneak in at the back.

HILARY: It's all right we're in an interval.

TIM exits from the window. KELLY looks in through the window as she passes.

Hi, Kelly.

KELLY: Hi.

KELLY exits from the window. TIM enters through the front door followed by KELLY.

TIM: Hello, Neil, joining in with the fun? All know Kelly, I take it. You must be Nad.

NAD: That's me.

TIM: Haven't come across a Nad before.

NAD: First time for everything.

TIM: What's that a contraction of?

NAD: Nothing. It's my name.

TIM: Your face looks familiar.

NAD: It is to me.

TIM: No, I can't place you.

LINDA enters from the kitchen with another bottle of wine.

Ah, another rustic vision. I must say you've pulled out all the stops for this play of yours – costume-wise. Let me guess, serving wench.

LINDA: Wrong first time. Goddess.

TIM: Ah. What are you, Neil?

HILARY: He's the Holly King.

TIM: Holly King. Not quite getting that from your costume, Neil. What's the play?

HILARY: The battle between the Oak and the Holly King.
TIM: No, don't know it. Who's it by?
HILARY: It's Celtic. A traditional re-enactment we're acting out.
TIM: Sounds like fun.
LINDA: *It was.*

LINDA hands the new bottle to NAD.

Monsieur.

TIM: So what are we drinking here? Ah, the Sancerre. Not a bad drop that.
HILARY: I'll fetch you a couple of glasses.
TIM: Thanks.

HILARY exits into the kitchen. NAD has opened the bottle. He fills LINDA's glass.

Kelly and I have just enjoyed a refreshing glass of Greco di Tufo in a lovely Italian osteria in Calne.

LINDA: How lovely for you both.
TIM: *We* enjoyed it, didn't we Kelly? You a wine buff, Nad?
NAD: Wouldn't say buff. I know how to enjoy it.
TIM: That's the main thing.
LINDA: And the wonderful thing is he doesn't need to sound like a bath emptying when he drinks it. You wouldn't believe the bestial noises he makes, Nad. Mortifying – especially in restaurants.
TIM: One has to to appreciate a good wine. Back me up on that Neil... Nad.

HILARY enters from the kitchen with two glasses. She fills them and gives them to TIM and KELLY.

Kelly's been learning – eh Kelly? She's a natural. An excellent nose and palette. Come on, you can give us a demonstration with this one.

LINDA: We know how to drink the stuff, thanks.

TIM: A *tasting* demonstration. Go on, Kelly. First...?

KELLY: First you need to look at it.

LINDA: Looks like a glass of wine to me.

TIM: For the colour.

LINDA: White, definitely white this one.

TIM: Light or dark. It's all clues to the grape, it's age.

LINDA: Just check the label.

TIM: Go on, Kelly, don't be put off by the hecklers.

KELLY: Move it around in the glass to release the aromas.

TIM: What do you get from this one?

KELLY: Gooseberries.

TIM: Yes, good. Green peppers.

LINDA: Grapes perhaps?

TIM: And then?

KELLY: Take some in the mouth with some air.

TIM: To aerate on the palate.

TIM, KELLY and HILARY do so noisily.

LINDA: Oh God, they're all at it! Don't join them, Nad, I beg you.

TIM: And now one can drink it. Excellent, Kelly, ten out of ten. Mmm not a bad drop this one. Interval over, we'll let you get back to your play.

LINDA: It's finished.

TIM: Don't let Kelly and me stop you.

LINDA: Too late.

TIM: Shame.

LINDA: Yes.

TIM: Kelly tells me you're a bit of a free spirit like her, Nad.

NAD: Sure.

TIM: Are you drawn here by the magic too, like Kelly – the crop circles I mean?

NAD: That's part of it.

TIM: Just a part?

NAD: I also come for the scenery.

TIM: Yes, understandably. Beautiful place here.

NAD: It is.

TIM: Kelly tells me you're a bit of an expert.

NAD: Expert?

TIM: On the circles.

NAD: I know they're not just circles, if that's what you mean. They come in all different shapes. Crop formations is a better word perhaps.

TIM: Kelly just took me into the new one on our travels.

HILARY: Like a tree isn't it.

TIM: Very much like a tree.

HILARY: One half bare and one half in leaf.

TIM: Kelly's pretty convinced they're of extra terrestrial origin.

KELLY: The good ones.

TIM: That your belief too, Nad?

NAD: I'll go along with that – the good ones, sure, why not.

TIM: Well, I must say, it would be nice to think we're being visited by an advanced civilisation – God knows little old planet Earth could do with a bit of a leg up the way things are going. No, the main difficulty I have – apart from believing in alien life period – is why some advanced intelligence – presuming they are advanced – well, they must be, I suppose – certainly

technologically to be able to get here in the first place – why they've travelled all this way – light years perhaps – just to make pretty patterns in cornfields. Surely – and this is just my opinion – they'd want to give humanity something a little more beneficial; a new device for generating non polluting energy perhaps, or a cure for some of the world's deadly diseases – things like that. And what's more, why so secretive? Why can't they just show themselves in plain sight – outside Ten Downing Street, if there's a parking space – at least on the White House lawn – plenty of parking space there?

NAD: Perhaps they think we'd try to nuke the shit out of them before they got to open their capsule door.

TIM: There is that I suppose. However, I'm still not convinced. Neither is my Uncle Sammy, eh Kelly? We had him dropping by earlier, threatening to see off any intruders with his gun. No, he's quite certain the cause of them is a little more terrestrial than extra, but until he catches anyone at it – gets one in the bag, so to speak – nothing's going to be proved for sure. My advice however – whether human or ET – would be to stay out of the fields, otherwise one's likely to get a fair bit of lead shot lodged in one's behind.

NAD: I'd be fascinated to hear what he hits.

TIM: Me too, me too.

KELLY: Let's hope he blows his own head off.

TIM: As you've probably guessed, Kelly and my Uncle Sammy didn't quite see eye to eye.

HILARY: I think we should carry on.

TIM: Sorry?

HILARY: With the story – the battle between the Oak and the Holly King.

LINDA: It's finished.

HILARY: I want to continue.

LINDA: Then you can continue without me.

HILARY: Then I'll be the Goddess – unless Kelly you want to – ?

KELLY: No, you go ahead.

HILARY: Nad?

NAD: Sure.

TIM: Good stuff, on with the show.

NAD: Perhaps you'd like to join in too.

TIM: Me? I don't know the play.

NAD: It's easy – you can take over my part.

TIM: What's your part?

NAD: The Oak King.

HILARY: Go on, Tim.

TIM: What do I have to do?

HILARY: Stand in the clearing, looking haughty and proud and playing with your Goddess.

LINDA: I'm sure he can manage that.

TIM: Neil's the Holly King?

NEIL: No.

TIM: I thought you said he was.

HILARY: He is.

NEIL: You can be it.

TIM: I'm the Oak King.

HILARY: Neil, carry on being the Holly King. Go on, back into your thicket.

TIM: Thicket?

HILARY: That's where he's hiding, watching us.

TIM: Peeping Tom is he?

HILARY: He's your arch enemy.

TIM: Go on, get stuffed you, back into your thicket.

HILARY: You don't see him yet.

TIM: Wherever you are.

HILARY: Nad, tell us what to do.

NAD: Okay, Holly King into your thicket again.

NEIL: I'm not doing this for much longer.

NAD: You won't be, we're just getting to the fight.

TIM: Fight.

HILARY: The battle between the two Kings.

NEIL: I'm not fighting anyone, I've got a bad shoulder.

NAD: Playacting, Neil.

NEIL: Does he know that?

HILARY: It's playacting, Tim.

TIM: Sure, just tell me what to do.

HILARY: Nad?

NAD: Hide, Holly King. In the Great Wood the mighty Oak King proudly stands. Having won back the Goddess in the spring he has enjoyed her for the past three months. It is now midsummer and the Oak – now at his most powerful – plays with her in the clearing. She moves as the summer breeze about his branches.

HILARY moves about TIM.

TIM: I like this.

LINDA: I'm so pleased I retired.

NAD: In a nearby thicket of trees his rival, the Holly King, looks on jealously. Look on jealously Holly King. You have an audience now.

NEIL attempts a jealous look. LINDA laughs.

NEIL: I said I'm no actor.

NAD: That's good, Holly King.

TIM: Do I see him now?

NAD: Not yet. The Holly King scans the trunk of his rival looking for a weakness.

TIM: Keep scanning, you won't find one.

LINDA: I can think of a place – a couple in fact.

NAD: Quiet, ex Goddess! The Goddess now steps from the clearing. She senses the presence of the Holly King and knows the time has come for battle. The Holly King shows himself at the edge of the clearing. Show yourself, Holly King.

NEIL does so.

TIM: I see him now?

NAD: You do.

TIM: Come on then, Holly King, if you think you're tree enough! I'm ready for you.

NAD: The Holly King stands his ground. He knows he's weak and has no chance of winning in arm to arm combat with the Great Oak.

TIM: Shouldn't that be branch to branch.

HILARY: Very good, Tim – sorry, Oak King.

TIM: So what happens?

NAD: The Holly King knows all he needs to do is lodge one of his thorns in the bark of his enemy. You'll need your weapon, Holly King.

NAD takes the poker and gives it to NEIL.

Here.

NEIL: What's this?

NAD: Your thorn.

TIM: He's not going to come at me with that is he?

LINDA: Now this is getting interesting.

TIM: Okay, if he's got that what do I have?

LINDA: Your arrogance.

NAD: This and this.

NAD takes a couple of cushions from the sofa. He gives them to TIM.

Your branches.

TIM: I'm not going to inflict much damage with these.

NAD: It's all you need.

TIM: You're right, it's all I need. He won't get close. Come on then, Holly King.

NAD: The Holly King prepares to make his first move. He knows he's got to be quick, decisively slipping under the Oak King's branches to plant his thorn. Ready, Holly King. Get ready to strike.

TIM: Come on, Holly King, do your worst. I'm ready for you.

NAD: Okay? And go, Holly King, go! Go! Go!

NEIL takes a couple of half-hearted steps and then pulls up.

LINDA: Oh dear.

TIM: Is that it!

NAD: You can do better than that, Holly King.

NEIL: What do you want me to do?

LINDA: Run him through.

NAD: Just a touch on his bark will do.

TIM: Come on you twig, you matchstick, you splinter! You won't get close.

NAD: He's taunting you again, Holy King. Get ready to go again. Make it more convincing this time.

TIM: Come on, come on.

NAD: Just one touch that's all you need. And go, Holly King! Go!

NEIL makes another attempt. He is beaten away by TIM's cushions.

Better, Holly King!

TIM: But no cigar!

NAD: Again, Holly King.

HILARY: Go on, Holly King!

NAD: The Goddess is cheering you on.

TIM: It's midsummer, you're supposed to be on my side.

HILARY: I want the seasons to continue.

TIM: Well, we'll see about that. Come on, you frosty little oik, come on!

NAD: Ready, Holly King? Make it count. And go! Go!

NEIL makes another attempt. He is beaten away by TIM's cushions once more.

TIM: Take that! And that!

NEIL falls to his knees.

NEIL: Ah!

HILARY: Okay, Neil?

NAD: Holly King. The Holly King's okay.

TIM: Doesn't look like we'll be having winter this year.

NEIL makes a more aggressive charge at TIM. TIM sidesteps and beats NEIL away. NEIL crashes to the floor, dropping the poker and clutching his arm.

NEIL: Ah!

HILARY: Neil!

TIM: Ha! Ha! The winner! The undisputed king!

NAD: This is how to do it!

NAD grabs the poker and makes a sudden move at TIM

with the poker raised. TIM, surprised, falls to the floor.

KELLY: Nad!

NAD stands over TIM.

NAD: The Holly King makes his wound.

He puts the poker to TIM's chest.

TIM: Well done, Holly King. I wasn't expecting that – the old switcheroo. Caught me off guard. Are we done?

NAD: Thought you might've recognised me.

TIM: What's that?

NAD: But I guess I'm not the skinny little kid I used to be – you used to know. The one you and your friends used to have fun with when you were here – flinging mud at... and other things.

TIM: Daniel? You're...?

KELLY: Nad?

HILARY: You're Daniel?

TIM: Everyone thought you were... They found your clothes... by the Bristol Channel.

NAD: Some of them.

KELLY: Nad, what's going on?

TIM: Does *he* know you're here?

NAD: No.

TIM: He'll be... amazed to see you.

KELLY: Nad?

TIM: You... ran away because of the fire?

NAD: Yes.

TIM: Why did you...?

NAD: Run away?

TIM: Set fire to them – the cottages.

NAD: I didn't.

TIM: Then why did you run away?

NAD: Because I knew he wouldn't believe me.

TIM: Look... it wasn't me who did it – if that's what you think – I was in Marlborough that day – all day. If it wasn't you then it must've been Trots – Kenny Totter – he was camping with me at the time. He came to join me – in Marlborough – later that day. He wouldn't have owned up to it – not Trots – if he'd done it... Well, he didn't. I guess you not being around when we returned made it easy for him to let you get the blame. Look... I'm sorry I... threw things at you. Totally out of order.

NAD: Boys will be boys.

KELLY: Nad?

NAD puts the poker down and crosses to the front door.

Nad, where are you going?

NAD: Don't follow me.

NAD exits through the front door.

TIM: Well... that was... unexpected.

KELLY: Who is he?

HILARY: Sammy's son – Daniel.

KELLY: What... your uncle's!

TIM: He's certainly changed, didn't recognise him – although I knew there was something familiar about him. Nad – Dan, Dan – Nad, I see what he did. You okay, Neil? Sorry, got a bit carried away there. I think we all did.

KELLY: What was that you were talking about – about the fire?

TIM: He set fire – well, it was *assumed* he set fire to the workers' cottages on the land here before he ran away.

KELLY: But he didn't, it was your friend.

TIM: Yes – well, if it wasn't Daniel it was.

KELLY: He said it wasn't. You don't believe him?

TIM: We've only got his word to take for it.

NEIL: What happened to his mother? Did she die when he was young – early teens?

TIM: Yes.

NEIL: A couple of years before the fire?

TIM: Possibly – why?

HILARY: Neil?

NEIL: I think he may've been being abused.

TIM: Abused?

NEIL: By his dad – your uncle. Physically – beaten, regularly, bruised... burned.

TIM: Who told you that?

NEIL: He did.

TIM: When?

NEIL: Earlier.

KELLY: The sadistic bastard, he should be locked up.

TIM: You knew he was Uncle Sammy's son?

NEIL: No. He told me in a story.

TIM: A story?

NEIL: About him.

LINDA: He does have a lot of scars.

TIM: People can get scars from a lot of things.

KELLY: It's obvious what he's like – that old sod – you know that.

TIM: And we know Nad – Daniel's – got quite an imagination on him too. That's also obvious.

KELLY: Did you know?

TIM: Did I know what?

KELLY: That it was your friend who set fire to those cottages?

TIM: No, I didn't.

KELLY: Did you know he was being abused – Nad – by that old bastard?

TIM: Of course I didn't and if I did I would've said something, wouldn't I?

KELLY exits through the front door.

Look... I just think we shouldn't be jumping to conclusions until the full facts are in. Let's get this place back to rights, shall we? Somebody give me a hand with this. Somebody, I can't shift it alone.

HILARY: I think you need to go and see your uncle, Tim.

TIM: I will.

HILARY: Now.

TIM: I will after we put this place back to rights.

NEIL: I think he may be in danger – your uncle. I think Daniel might be wanting to take matters into his own hands.

TIM: What do you mean by that?

SAMMY appears at the open front door, without Jip. He carries his old brief case and his shotgun.

SAMMY: Knock, knock. What's this, you had a break in?

TIM: Jesus, what are you doing with that, Uncle Sammy?

SAMMY: Seeing off the rats.

SAMMY leans the gun against the wall by the door.

NEIL: Your son's here.

SAMMY: What's that?

NEIL: You son, Daniel, he's here.

SAMMY: Daniel's dead.

NEIL: No he isn't.

TIM: He's here. He's alive. He's just left.

SAMMY: What does he want?

NEIL: To see you probably.

SAMMY: You stay out of this! Timothy?

TIM: Yes... to see you.

NEIL: Aren't you pleased he's alive?

SAMMY: I said stay out of this – this is between family!

KELLY appears outside the window.

KELLY: Hey, you old bastard, I thought you might like to know your shack's on fire.

SAMMY: Fire!

KELLY exits from the window.

He wants me... he wants me dead. Timothy?

NEIL: Where's your dog?

SAMMY: He's in there. Jip's in there.

NEIL hurries to the front door.

HILARY: Neil, be careful!

NEIL exits through the front door.

SAMMY: Timothy?

HILARY: Tim, go with him. Help him.

TIM: Someone call the emergency services.

TIM hurriedly exits through the front door.

SAMMY: Timothy? Timothy?

SAMMY starts coughing and wheezing. HILARY fetches her mobile.

HILARY: No reception.

A small explosion is heard in the distance. A gas cylinder igniting in SAMMY's property. HILARY and LINDA hurry through the front door. SAMMY has taken out his hip flask. He drinks. There is the sound of glass breaking within the kitchen as a stone is thrown against the window. SAMMY fetches his gun.

SAMMY: Daniel? Daniel, is that you?

SAMMY moves cautiously towards the kitchen door.

Daniel? You in there? Daniel?

NAD appears outside the window. He briefly looks in. He exits from the window and enters through the front door.

I said are you in there! Daniel?

NAD silently creeps up behind SAMMY. SAMMY turns, but NAD is close enough to snatch the gun from him. NAD takes a few steps back.

Daniel? Look at you. Alive. You're a big man now, Daniel, a big man. You thought I was in there, did you? I 'ad good reason, Daniel, good reason for what I did.

NAD: Good reason!

SAMMY: She betrayed me, betrayed me with that bastard, Jack!

NAD: Don't make her an excuse for what you were like! What you are: a sadistic, vicious, worthless piece of...

SAMMY: Daniel... Listen, Daniel...

NAD: Shit.

NAD leans the gun against a wall and picks up the fire poker.

SAMMY: What are you going to do? Daniel? I'm a defenceless old man.

NAD moves towards SAMMY.

NAD: I was a defenceless young kid.

SAMMY: Daniel. Daniel –

NAD quickly raises the poker to strike. SAMMY cries out and cowers. NAD holds the poker mid air.

NAD: No, too easy. Too easy to be like you. I'll let the earth swallow you up instead... all your filth and poison.

HILARY: *(Off.)* That's it. Come on.

NAD crosses to the window and briefly looks out. He throws the poker down and exits through the kitchen and out through the kitchen window. HILARY enters through the front door followed by NEIL assisting TIM. LINDA follows after. TIM's face is burned on one side. He's slightly concussed and his arm is dislocated. NEIL's hand is bleeding.

NEIL: Here.

NEIL helps TIM into the chair.

HILARY: I'll find something to put on it.

HILARY exits into the kitchen.

TIM: What fell on me?

NEIL: The chimney.

TIM: Christ! *(To SAMMY.)* We tried. We bloody tried.

NEIL: *(To SAMMY.)* The smoke would've got him first.

TIM: *(Shoulder.)* Ah! No, it's definitely out.

HILARY enters from the kitchen with a couple of wetted tea towels.

HILARY: This will help. Can you hold this to your face, Tim?

TIM does so.

Your hand's bleeding, Neil.

TIM: Bloody hero this one! Punched through the glass to get in.

HILARY: Let's have a look. It looks like there's a shard in there – maybe

a couple. I'll get some tweezers.

HILARY goes to her bag. SAMMY, as if in a daze, crosses to the front door without picking up his gun.

NEIL: I wouldn't go down there if I were you.

TIM: Uncle Sammy... wait. You need to know something. It wasn't him – Daniel – who set fire to the cottages. It was me. I did it. It was an accident. I was scared... of what you might say... what you might do.

SAMMY exits through the front door.

We were camping nearby. Trots went off into Marlborough earlier that day to meet some girl. I made a fire close by the cottages. I wanted to cook something I'd caught – hunter style. I was sure I'd put the fire out. I went for a hike up a nearby hill. I reached the top, looked down and saw the smoke... the fire. There was nothing I could do. I got a bus into town, met up with Kenny. I told him what had happened. Of course Trots was going to back me up – whatever I said. Daniel running off made it easy for me to... let him get the blame.

HILARY: Give me your hand, Neil.

NEIL: We tried.

HILARY: I know. *(NEIL's hand.)* This might hurt a bit.

HILARY puts the tweezers to NEIL's hand.

NEIL: Ah!

Lights down.

Scene 2

The following morning. 10.45 a.m.

A thunderstorm is brewing. The windows and doors are closed.

The sound of dog barking is heard outside. NEIL passes outside the window, holding a dog lead.

NEIL: That's it, Jip! Good boy! Good boy! Let's put you here, shall we. That's it. Sit! Sit boy! Sit! Good boy, Jip!

NEIL enters through the front door, leaving it open.

His hand is bandaged. He checks his mobile as he exits into the kitchen. After a couple of moments Jip barks.

(From kitchen.) Quiet boy, it's on its way.

NAD appears at the front door. NEIL enters from the kitchen carrying a bowl of water.

NAD: Made a friend I see. Thought I'd leave him for you to look after. You've probably got better food than I have. Of course if you don't want to, I can...

NEIL: I'll take him. We thought he was in there.

NAD: I wasn't going to let him fry was I?

NEIL: Did you think *he* was in there?

NAD: I saw him heading up here. How's Tim?

NEIL: Burnt. He went home this morning – with Linda – to get him specialist treatment.

NAD: *(Weather.)* Looks like it's going to break. Had to sooner or later.

NEIL: We found him sitting on a tree stump, your... whatever he is to you.

NAD: Nothing.

NEIL: Wouldn't speak to us... or to anyone – he's been taken in to care. Tim owned up to setting fire to the cottages – by accident. He said it was him, not his friend.

NAD: I know. I saw him do it – light his camp fire. I tracked him up the hill. I saw the smoke from up there. I hurried back but there was nothing I could do. I saw him get on the bus and go. I knew I'd get the blame for it if I hung around... I also knew I'd get the blame if I didn't. I suppose he did me a favour – making my mind up for me to get the hell away from here... from *him*.

NEIL: Where did you go?

NAD: Where didn't I? I did think about it, I must say – sitting on the bank by the Channel, waiting for the tide to turn – putting an end to it all... to me.

NEIL: What stopped you?

NAD: Life. Seemed like the better option.

NEIL: I thought you might've been going to... Like the kid in your story... with *him*.

NAD: Beat out his brains with a fire poker? Nah, not my style.

NEIL: Tim said – if I saw you – to tell you this place is rightfully yours.

NAD: Too many memories. Say goodbye to Hils. Can I call her that?

NEIL: Good luck.

NAD: And you... Holly King.

NAD exits through the front door. Jip barks.

NEIL: It's okay, Jip.

There is a distant rumble of thunder. NEIL exits through the front door.

(Off.) There you go, boy.

NEIL enters through the front door. He considers for a moment and then exits upstairs. Sound of car arriving. Jip barks. Sound of car doors opening and closing. HILARY passes by the window.

HILARY: *(Off.)* Hello, Jip. Good boy! Yes you are! Yes you are! Sit!

HILARY enters through the front door carrying a shopping bag. NEIL enters from upstairs with a blanket.

NEIL: Hi.

HILARY: *(Holding up bag.)* Do you know how expensive dog food is? *(Blanket.)* Been taking a nap, or is that for him?

NEIL: It's for us. I thought we could go for a drive. Have a picnic lunch perhaps... in a field somewhere.

There is another closer rumble of thunder. Jip barks.

Summer storm. It'll pass. *(Calling.)* It's okay, Jip. And I've been thinking, when we get back, I'll call the solicitor. See what I can do.

HILARY: I'll change my shoes.

NEIL: Here. I'll be in the car.

*NEIL takes the car keys and bag from HILARY.
HILARY exits upstairs. There is another closer rumble
of thunder. Jip barks. NEIL exits through the front door.*

(Off.) It's all right, Jip. Only a bit of thunder, that's all. We're going for walkies. Drivies first and then walkies. Let's go! Come on!

NEIL passes by the window. Sound of car door opening.

In you go, boy! In you go!

*Sound of car door closing. Sound of car trying to start
and engine starting on third attempt. A loud crack and
rumble of thunder. The rain starts to fall. HILARY
enters from upstairs.*

HILARY: *(To herself.)* Oh, Neil... of all days.

*HILARY exits through the front door, closing and
locking it behind her. She hurries past the window,
screaming through the rain. Sound of car door opening
and closing. Sound of car pulling away and into the
distance. After some moments NAD appears outside the
window and looks in. He exits from the window. Sound
of window catch being unfastened. NAD enters from the
kitchen. He takes the chair and places it under the
picture above the fireplace. He lifts the picture forward
and feels behind it retrieving a secreted photo. It's a
photo of his mother. He studies it for a couple of
moments. KELLY appears outside the window with a
pack on her back. She taps on the glass. NAD signals
for her to wait. She exits from the window. NAD puts
the photo safely in a pocket. He replaces the chair. He
picks up the poker and replaces it with the rest of the
fire irons. He is about to leave but then takes the lighter
from his pocket and places it on the coffee table. He
exits into the kitchen. Sound of window closing. More
thunder and heavy rain. Lights down. Curtain.*